

Article

# Product and Process Fingerprint for Nanosecond Pulsed Laser Ablated Superhydrophobic Surface

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**Abstract:** Superhydrophobic surfaces have attracted extensive attention over the last few decades. It is mainly due to their capabilities of providing several interesting functions such as self-cleaning, corrosion resistance, anti-icing and drag reduction. Nanosecond pulsed laser ablation is considered as a promising technique to fabricate superhydrophobic structures. Many research proved that machined surface morphology has a significant effect on the hydrophobicity of specimen. However, few quantitative investigations were conducted to identify effective process parameters and surface characterization parameters for laser-ablated microstructures which are sensitive to the hydrophobicity of microstructured surface. This paper proposed and reveals for the first time, the concepts of process and product fingerprints for laser ablated superhydrophobic surface through experimental investigation and statistical analysis. The results of correlation analysis showed that a newly proposed dimensionless functional parameter in this paper,  $R_{hy}$  i.e. the average ratio of  $R_z$  to  $R_{sm}$  is the most sensitive surface characterization parameter to the water contact angle of specimen, which can be regarded as the product fingerprint. It also proposes another new process parameter, average laser pulse energy per unit area of specimen ( $I_s$ ), as the best process fingerprint which can be used to control the product fingerprint  $R_{hy}$ . The threshold value of  $R_{hy}$  and  $I_s$  are 0.41 and 536 J/mm<sup>2</sup> respectively, which help to ensure the superhydrophobicity (contact angle larger than 150°) of specimen in laser ablation process. Therefore, the process and product fingerprints overcome the research challenge of the so-called inverse problem in manufacturing as they can be used to determine the required process parameters and surface topography according to the specification of superhydrophobicity.

**Keywords:** Laser ablation; Superhydrophobic surface; Process fingerprint; Product fingerprint; Surface morphology.

## 1. Introduction

Superhydrophobic surfaces are defined as those having water contact angle larger than 150° and sliding angle less than 10°. Artificial superhydrophobic surfaces, created by surface structuring or coating, have received tremendous attention in recent years. It is mainly due to their capabilities of providing several interesting functions such as self-cleaning, corrosion resistance, anti-icing and drag reduction [1–6]. Surface chemical composition and morphology are two critical factors in determining their hydrophobicity [7–9]. The surface chemical composition affects the intrinsic contact angle, which can be measured by a liquid droplet deposited on a smooth surface. However, in artificial or natural materials, the maximum intrinsic contact angle is only approximately 120° [8,9]. For this reason, more and more structuring technologies have been developed for the

45 fabrication of superhydrophobic surfaces, including wet chemical reaction, lithography, rolling, 3D  
46 printing, micro milling and laser ablation [2,6,10–15] etc.

47 Recently, laser ablation process has been demonstrated as a promising technique to fabricate  
48 superhydrophobic structures on varied materials, such as copper, aluminium, steel and glass [16–  
49 27]. Yang et al. investigated the wettability transition mechanism of laser ablated aluminium  
50 substrate, the results indicated that laser-ablated microstructures had the amplified effects on the  
51 hydrophobicity of specimen [27]. Long et al. reported the effect of the laser pulse energy and width  
52 on the morphology of micro/nanostructures on a copper surface. They found that the morphology of  
53 the laser ablated structures is more sensitive to the laser pulse energy when nanosecond lasers with  
54 long pulse widths are used. Slightly decreasing the laser pulse energy results in the formation of no  
55 hierarchical micro- and nanostructures [21,22]. Gregorcic et al. fabricated a 316L stainless steel  
56 specimen with a pitch of 50  $\mu\text{m}$  at average pulse power of 0.6 W and 97% pulse overlapping rate and  
57 achieved a static contact angle of 153° [18]. Long and Gregorcic both reported that variation of pitch  
58 of channels resulted in completely different surface morphologies—from the highly porous surface  
59 to well-separated microchannels, which width and depth depend on laser fluence [18]. Duong Ta et  
60 al. concluded that surface roughness could be well controlled by laser power. The arithmetical mean  
61 height,  $S_a$  increased linearly when laser fluence was higher than 33 J/cm<sup>2</sup>. The roughness was  
62 around 2 and 7 times larger than that of the untextured surface under fluences of 36 and 48 J/cm<sup>2</sup>,  
63 respectively [26]. In addition, the effect of laser fluence and line separation on contact angle of laser  
64 structured surfaces were investigated. Experimental results showed that the specimens possess  
65 superhydrophobicity has pitches of 50–150  $\mu\text{m}$  and machined at the laser fluence of 36 J/cm<sup>2</sup> [26]. M.  
66 Conradi discovered that higher line density resulted in a higher contact angle. However, the average  
67 surface roughness  $S_a$  increased first then further decreased gradually with the increase of line  
68 density [28]. Thus, these researches have indicated that the laser machining parameters would  
69 significantly influence the hydrophobicity of the specimens while surface topography is a crucial  
70 factor to determine the superhydrophobicity of the specimen. However, there has been little  
71 systematic research exploring the correlation between surface topography and hydrophobicity of  
72 specimen. Furtherly, the second challenge is to find out the most effective process parameter and  
73 surface characterization parameter for these microstructures which are sensitive to the  
74 hydrophobicity of microstructured surface.

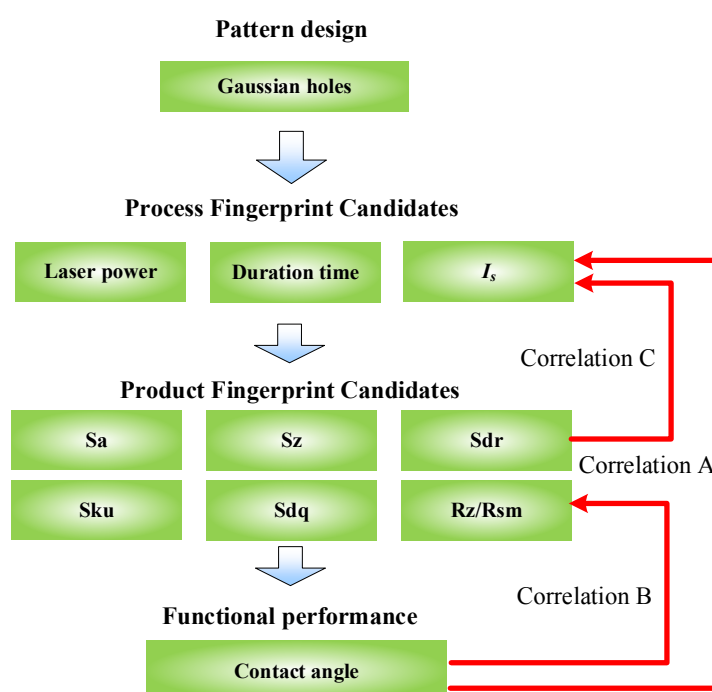
75 The identification of “product and process fingerprints” of laser ablated surface is a possible  
76 solution to solve the above issues. The concept of “product fingerprint” refers to those unique  
77 measurable characteristics (e.g., surface characterization parameters) on the laser ablated specimen  
78 that, if kept under control and within specifications, will ensure that the specimen possesses  
79 superhydrophobicity as required. The product fingerprint must be also sensitive to the variation of  
80 process parameters, hence it can be well-controlled by process parameters. For laser ablation  
81 process, since the surface characterization parameters are highly related to laser machining  
82 parameters, the “Process fingerprint” is defined as a specific process parameter to be controlled in  
83 order to maintain the manufacture of specimen within the specified surface characterization  
84 parameters. The product and process fingerprints can be used as an objective function within an  
85 optimization tool to assist to determine the required surface topography and process parameters for  
86 superhydrophobic surface.

87 The purpose of this paper is to reveal the product and process fingerprints for the laser  
88 ablation process of superhydrophobic surfaces on 316L stainless steel. A more generalized  
89 description can be achieved by linking laser machining parameters, surface characterization  
90 parameters and hydrophobicity of specimen, which is beneficial to precise control of hydrophobicity  
91 and simultaneously enhancing its robustness. Therefore, product and process fingerprints are  
92 expected to provide a solution to the so-called inverse problem in manufacturing, which means the  
93 laser machining parameters and surface characterization parameters can be determined according to  
94 the required hydrophobicity i.e. contact angle. Firstly, analysis of potential process and product  
95 fingerprint candidates will be carried out. Then, the most appropriate product fingerprint will be  
96 determined from values of Spearman and Kendall rank correlation coefficients according to the

experimental results. Thirdly, a new process parameter will be put forward and chosen as the best process fingerprint. Lastly, the correlation between process fingerprint and functional performance i.e. contact angle will be explored.

## 2. Analysis of process and product fingerprints

Figure 1 illustrates the concept of process and product fingerprints in the laser ablation process for obtaining superhydrophobic surface with array of Gaussian holes of designed geometry. The comparison of all the potential candidates of process and product fingerprints will be discussed in detail later. Most research performed to date has focused on the Correlation A. i.e., the effect of laser machining parameters on the contact angle of specimens. However, Correlation A is actually composed of Correlation B and C. Correlation B refers to the relationship between contact angle and product fingerprint, which is used to explain the underlying mechanism of effect of surface topography on hydrophobicity. And Correlation C can describe the relationship between the process fingerprint and product fingerprint to explore how the process parameters affect the surface topography. Thus, product fingerprint is a bridge to connect process parameters and functional performance-contact angle.



**Figure 1.** Concept of process and product fingerprints in laser ablation of superhydrophobic surface.

### 2.1 Analysis of process fingerprint candidates: laser power, exposure time, laser pulse energy per unit area of specimen

#### Laser power $P$

In a nanosecond pulsed laser ablation process, the absorbed energy from the laser pulse melts the stainless steel and heats it to a temperature at which the atoms gain sufficient energy to enter into a gaseous state. Due to the vapour and plasma pressure, the molten materials are partially ejected from the cavity and form surface debris. At the end of a pulse, the heat quickly dissipates into the bulk of the work material and recast layer are formed. Therefore, laser power is a good candidate of process fingerprint as it determines the laser fluence which directly affects the formation of microstructures. The relationship between laser power, pulse repetition rate and peak power can be expressed as:

$$E_p = \frac{P}{f_p} \quad (1)$$

$$P_{peak} = \frac{E_p}{\Delta\tau} \quad (2)$$

where  $P$  is laser average power,  $f_p$  is pulse repetition rate,  $E_p$  is the energy of a single pulse,  $P_{peak}$  is the peak power of laser and  $\Delta\tau$  is the pulse duration, respectively.

**Exposure** time  $t$

For substrate with periodic Gaussian holes generated by the laser ablation process, the exposure time  $t$  means the machining time for a single Gaussian hole, which determines the number of laser pulses that irradiated the surface. It has a significant effect on the dimension and morphology of Gaussian holes. As shown in Figure 2, the relationship between the number of irradiated pulse  $N$  and exposure time  $t$  can be expressed as:

$$N = \frac{t}{T} \quad (3)$$

where  $T$  is the pulse period.

Laser pulse energy per unit area of specimen  $I_s$

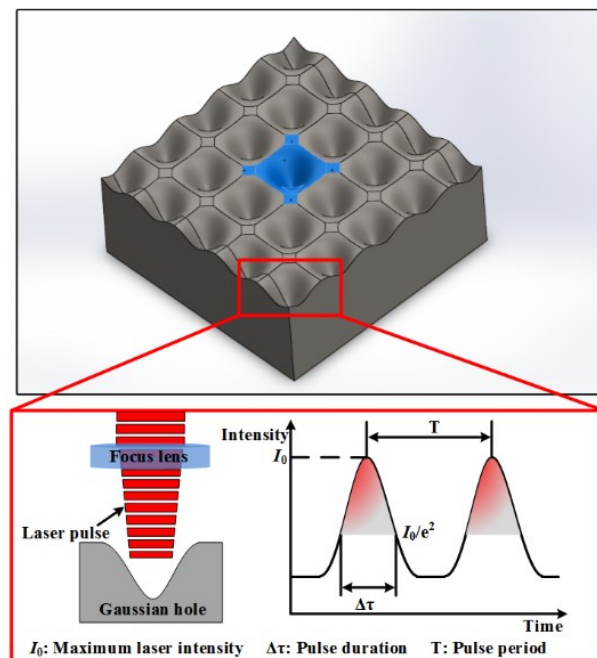
$I_s$  means the average laser pulse energy irradiated on a unit area of specimen. This parameter depends on pulse repetition rate  $f_p$  and exposure time  $t$ . It can be expressed as:

$$I_s = \frac{t * f_p * E_p * (\frac{L}{Pitch})^2}{L^2} \quad (4)$$

According to Equation (1),  $f_p * E_p = P$ , hence Equation (4) can be simplified as:

$$I_s = \frac{t * P}{Pitch^2} \quad (5)$$

where pitch is the distance between adjacent Gaussian holes, and  $L$  is the length of specimen.



**Figure 2.** Schematic of periodic Gaussian holes machined by laser ablation process.

## 2.2 Analysis of product fingerprint candidates: $S_a$ , $S_z$ , $S_{ku}$ , $S_{dr}$ , $S_{dq}$ , $R_{hy}$

In literature, two typical models have been developed to describe the behaviour of a droplet on rough surfaces, i.e. the Wenzel and Cassie-Baxter models.[29,30]. According to the Wenzel model,

the droplet maintains contact with the structures and penetrates the asperities, and the surface contact area is increased. In addition, the contact angle  $\theta_w$  can be described as:

$$\cos\theta_w = r\cos\theta \quad (6)$$

$$r = \frac{\text{actual surface area}}{\text{planar area}} \quad (7)$$

where,  $r$  is the roughness factor, which defined as the ratio of actual area of the solid surface to the planar area.  $\theta$  is the intrinsic contact angle of the material.

Alternatively, according to the Cassie-Baxter model, the droplet is not able to penetrate the microstructure spaces. However, in order to ensure the droplet cannot contact with the bottom of the microstructures, so the sag in height of water droplet between microstructures should be smaller than the depth of microstructures. Moreover, deep microstructures will help to form stable air pockets under the water droplet. And stable air pockets underneath the water droplet help the formation of superhydrophobicity with strong resistance against transition to the Wenzel state. Hence, sufficient depth of microstructure is essential to realize Cassie-Baxter state of the water droplet. The static contact angle  $\theta_{CB}$  can be expressed as:

$$\cos\theta_{CB} = -1 + f(1 + \cos\theta) \quad (8)$$

$$f = \frac{\text{actual solid and liquid contact area}}{\text{planar area}} \quad (9)$$

where  $f$  is the fraction of solid-liquid contact area.

The above analysis proves that the contact angles obtained in both Wenzel and Cassie-Baxter states are highly related to the height and horizontal feature of surface topography. Six surface characterization parameters that most probably correlated with the hydrophobicity of specimens are listed in Table 1.  $S_a$ ,  $S_z$  and  $S_{ku}$  are roughness parameters to characterize height of the surface.  $S_{dr}$ ,  $S_{dq}$ ,  $R_{hy}$  are hybrid parameters which determined from both height and horizontal parameters of surface. For a rough surface,  $S_{dr}$  means the additional surface area contributed by the texture as compared to the planar definition area. Therefore,  $1+S_{dr}$  has the same meaning with roughness factor  $r$  in the Wenzel state.

Theoretical analysis proved that microstructures should have a high aspect ratio to provide a larger surface area and a smaller separation distance which will help to improve the stabilization of the solid-liquid-air composite interface [31]. However, present functional cannot reflect the aspect ratio of surface asperities. Hence,  $R_{hy}$  is proposed for the first time as a dimensionless functional parameter in this research and defined as the average ratio of  $R_z$  to  $R_{sm}$ . The subscript "hy" is the short abbreviation of hydrophobicity. The  $R_{hy}$  is calculated from the average value of 60 lines that evenly distributed on the structured surface horizontally and vertically. A surface with large  $R_{hy}$  can be obtained from a large  $R_z$  or smaller  $R_{sm}$ , which means the features of the surface should have a large depth or smaller separation distance (i. e. high density) in the horizontal direction.

**Table 1.** Product fingerprint candidates.

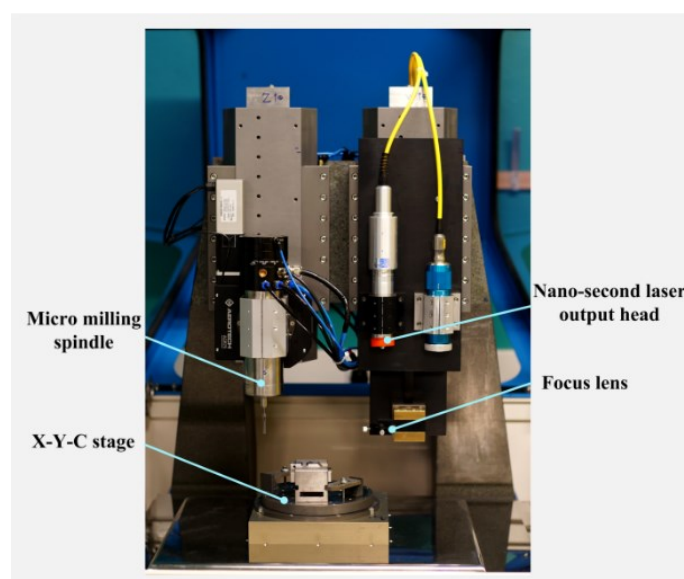
Name	Symbol	Meaning
Arithmetical mean height	$S_a$	The difference in height of each point compared to the arithmetical mean of the surface.
Maximum height	$S_z$	The sum of the largest peak height value and the largest pit depth value within the defined area.
Kurtosis	$S_{ku}$	A measure of the sharpness of the roughness profile. $S_{ku}<3$ : Height distribution is skewed above the mean plane. $S_{ku}=3$ : Height distribution is normal. (Sharp portions and indented portions co-exist.) $S_{ku}>3$ : Height distribution is spiked.
Developed interfacial area ratio	$S_{dr}$	The percentage of the definition area's additional surface area contributed by the texture as compared to the planar definition area.



Root mean square gradient	Sdq	Root mean square of slopes at all points in the definition area. When a surface has any slope, its Sdq value becomes larger.
Average ratio of Rz to Rsm	R <sub>hy</sub>	Average ratio of maximum height of profile (Rz) and mean width of the profile elements (RSm)

### 3. Experimental details

Laser machining experiments were carried out on AISI 316L stainless steel by varying the process parameters in order to identify the best product and process fingerprints. All the experiments were carried out on a hybrid ultra-precision machine as shown in Figure 3. It is equipped with a nanosecond pulsed fiber laser which has a central emission wavelength of 1064 nm. The laser source has a nominal average output power of 20 W and its maximum pulse repetition rate is 200 kHz. For a pulse repetition rate of 20 kHz, the average pulse duration is 100 ns and pulse energy is 1 mJ. The laser machining parameters are listed in Table 2 and 3. After the laser ablation process, the specimens were cleaned ultrasonically with deionized water, acetone and ethanol successively. Then the prepared specimens were silanized in a vacuum oven using silane reagent (1H, 1H, 2H, 2H-Perfluorooctyltriethoxysilane, 97%, Alfa Aesar Ltd), at 100 °C for 12 hours to reduce their surface free energies.



**Figure 3.** Experimental setup for laser machining trials.

**Table 2.** The laser machining parameters with varied laser power and pitch.

Pitch (μm)	Laser power (W)	Pulse repetition rate	Feed rate (mm/min)	Exposure time (s)	Pattern types
90	4,6,10,14,20	100K	200	0.4	Gaussian holes
110	4,6,10,14,20	100K	200	0.4	Gaussian holes
130	4,6,10,14,20	100K	200	0.4	Gaussian holes
150	4,6,10,14,20	100K	200	0.4	Gaussian holes

**Table 3.** The laser machining parameters with varied exposure time and pitch.

Pitch ( $\mu\text{m}$ )	Laser power (W)	Pulse repetition rate	Feed rate (mm/min)	Exposure time (s)	Pattern types
70	20	100K	200	0.2,0.4,0.6,1	Gaussian holes
90	20	100K	200	0.2,0.4,0.6,1	Gaussian holes
110	20	100K	200	0.2,0.4,0.6,1	Gaussian holes
130	20	100K	200	0.2,0.4,0.6,1	Gaussian holes
150	20	100K	200	0.2,0.4,0.6,1	Gaussian holes

The surface topography and varied surface characterization parameters of the laser structured surface were measured by a 3D **laser scanning confocal microscope** (VK-250, Keyence). The static contact angle on surfaces was measured by a drop shape analyzer (Kruss Ltd.). The selected water droplet volume was 5  $\mu\text{L}$ . For each specimen, the contact angle of the water droplet was measured three times and the average value was adopted.

## 4. Results and Discussion

### 4.1 Analysis of product fingerprint: $S_a$ , $S_z$ , $S_{ku}$ , $S_{dr}$ , $S_{dq}$ , $R_{hy}$

The investigation of experimental results was carried out to identify the product fingerprint from six candidates related to surface topography. The product fingerprint is the indicator that has the highest level of correlation to contact angle. In this research, Spearman rank correlation coefficient and Kendall rank correlation coefficient were employed to determine the product fingerprint. Spearman rank correlation coefficient evaluates how strong the correlation between two variables can be defined by a monotonic function. It measures the strength and direction of monotonic association between two variables, a perfect Spearman correlation of +1 or -1 occurs when each variable is a perfect monotone function of the other [32]. A positive Spearman correlation coefficient corresponds to an increasing monotonic trend between two variables, while a negative value means a decreasing monotonic trend. In addition, Spearman rank correlation coefficient is appropriate for data that is not normally distributed. It can be used to identify a non-linear correlation between two variables. Kendall rank correlation coefficient is a statistic used to measure the ordinal association between two variables [33]. However, unlike Spearman coefficient, **Kendall rank correlation coefficient only considers directional agreement while does not consider the difference between ranks**. Therefore, this coefficient is more appropriate for discrete data. This coefficient returns a value of -1 to 1, where 0 is no correlation, 1 is a perfect positive correlation, and -1 is a perfect negative correlation. In most cases, the interpretations of Spearman and Kendall rank correlation coefficients are very similar and thus invariably lead to the same inferences. The above two coefficients were combined to determine the product fingerprint that has the maximum absolute value. The strength of the correlation between the variables can be evaluated by the absolute value of coefficients as shown in Table 4.

**Table 4.** Interpretation of the strength of correlation coefficient.

Value of Coefficient	Correlation type
1	Perfect correlation
0.81-0.99	Strong correlation
0.71 - 0.80	Good correlation
0.51- 0.70	Weak correlation

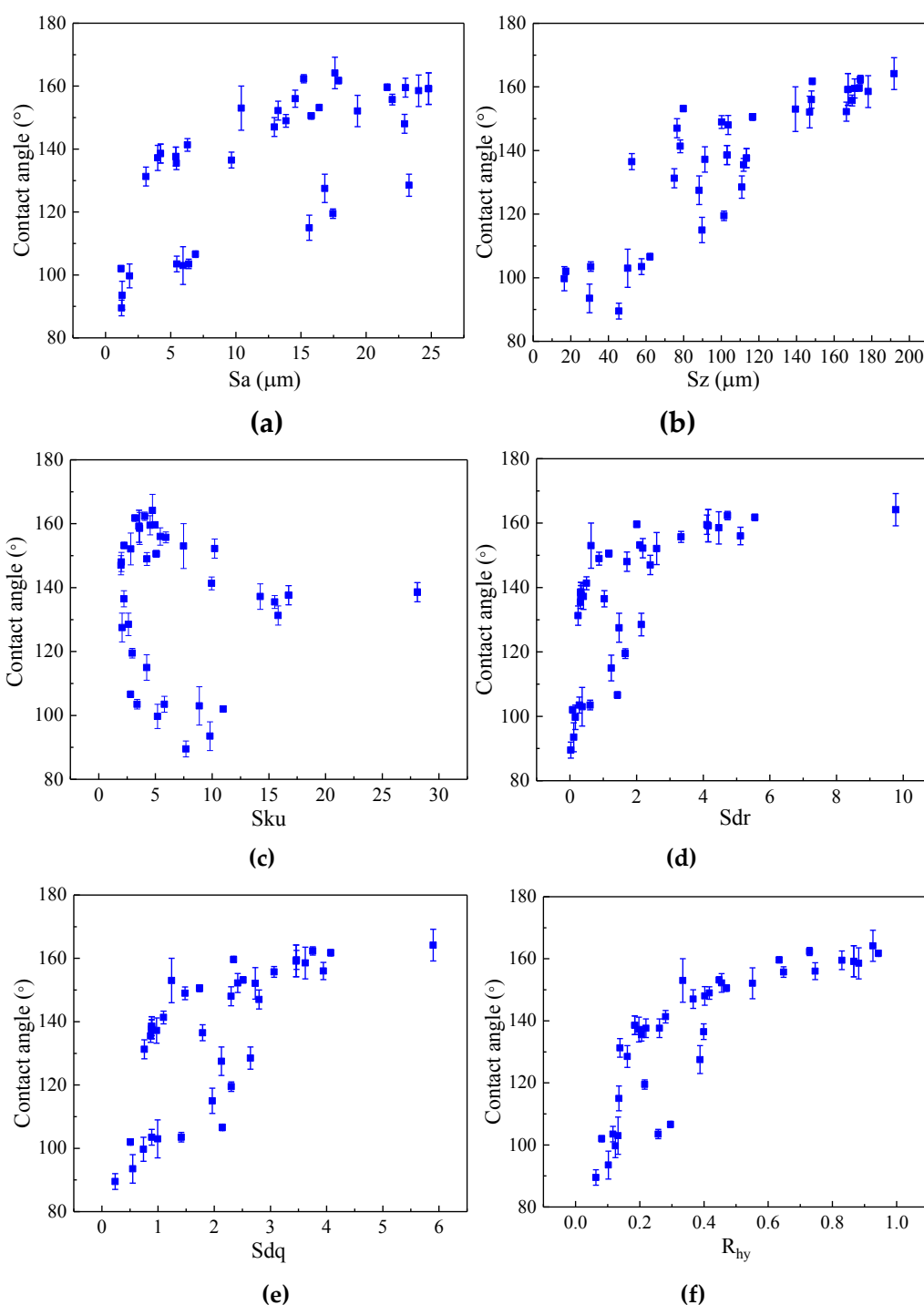
0.01 - 0.50

Poor correlation

0

No correlation

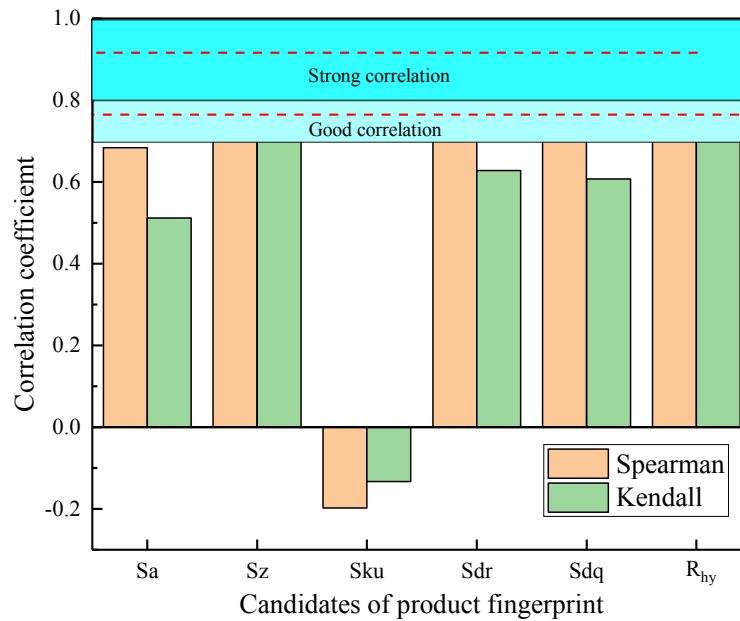
Figure 4 shows scatter plots between contact angle and the six candidates of product fingerprint. With the increase of  $S_a$ ,  $S_z$ ,  $S_{dr}$ ,  $S_{dq}$  and  $R_{hy}$ , the contact angle shows an increasing trend. It should be noted that a good linear relationship appears between  $S_z$  and contact angle, which is similar to the authors' previous study [15]. However, it can be observed that there is no apparent correlation between  $S_{ku}$  and contact angle (Figure 4 (c)). As shown in Figure 4 (d), increasing  $S_{dr}$  from 0.02 to 4.1 leads to contact angle increase rapidly from  $89.5^\circ$  to  $159^\circ$ , but it has a minor impact on the contact angle when  $S_{dr}$  was further increased from 4.1 to 9.8. As Figure 4 (f) indicates, the contact angle increases gradually from  $89.5^\circ$  to  $164^\circ$  with the value of  $R_{hy}$  increasing from 0.06 to 0.94.





**Figure 4.** Influence of the product fingerprint candidates on the contact angle for Gaussian hole pattern: (a) Sa; (b) Sz; (c) Sku; (d) Sdr; (e) Sdq; (f)  $R_{hy}$ .

Figure 5 shows the variation of Spearman and Kendall rank correlation coefficient between contact angle and candidates of product fingerprint. According to the criterion in Table 4, Sz and  $R_{hy}$  both have larger Spearman rank correlation coefficients with contact angle, which are 0.89 and 0.92 respectively. And the Kendall rank correlation coefficient among Sz,  $R_{hy}$  and contact angle are 0.74 and 0.76. Thus, the results of Figure 5 suggest that  $R_{hy}$  should be determined as the best product fingerprint as it has the maximum Spearman and Kendall rank correlation coefficients.



**Figure 5.** Spearman and Kendall rank correlation coefficient between contact angle and six candidates of product fingerprint.

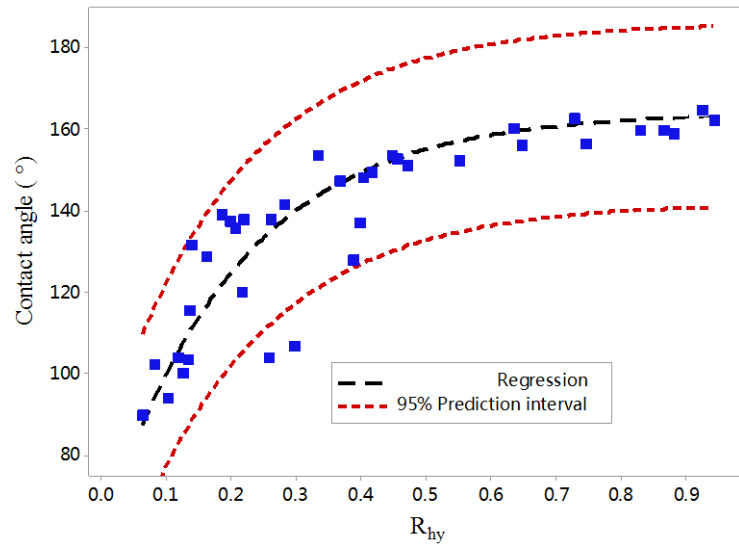
According to the results in Figure 4 (f), an empirical equation was deduced to correlate the experimental  $R_{hy}$  and contact angle. The equation is expressed as:

$$\theta_A = a - b * e^{c * R_{hy}} \quad (10)$$

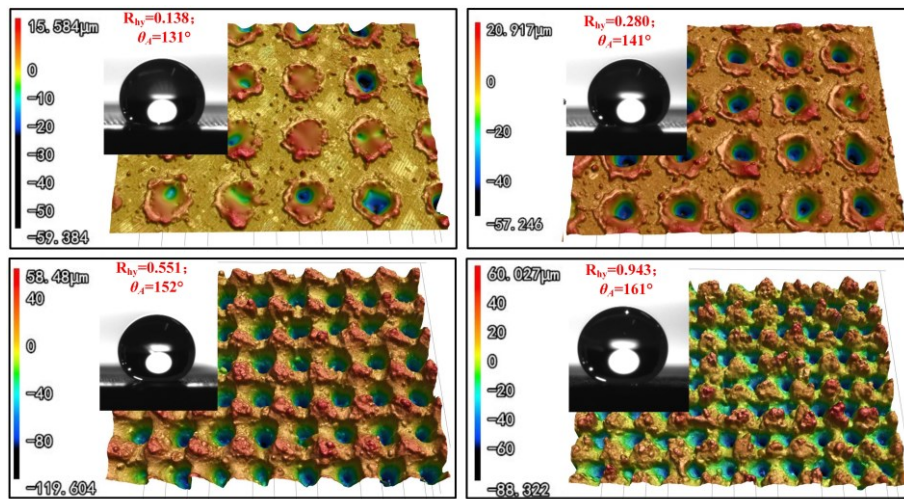
where,  $\theta_A$  is contact angle;  $a$ ,  $b$  and  $c$  are constant values, equal to 164, 105 and -4.9 respectively.

As shown in Figure 6 (a), the regression curve has good precision to simulate the experimental data. We found that coefficient “ $a$ ” means the maximum contact angle (164° in this research), the value of “ $b$ ” is equal to the initial contact angle (105°) of 316L stainless steel after chemical modification. Thus, contact angle of specimen is highly related to its maximum contact angle, initial contact angle on a smooth surface and hydrophobicity functional parameter  $R_{hy}$ . According to Equation (10), the value of  $R_{hy}$  is 0.41 when  $\theta_A=150$ . Thus, 0.41 can be regarded as the threshold value of  $R_{hy}$  that ensure water contact angle of specimen higher than 150°.

The dimensionless ratio  $R_{hy}$  is the most sensitive candidate parameter for contact angle of the specimen, which can therefore, be regarded as product fingerprint. In literature, many studies proved that a high density of microstructures and smaller period of microstructure will help decrease solid-liquid contact area and increase its hydrophobicity [34,35]. With the increase of  $R_{hy}$  from 0.138 to 0.943 (Figure 6 (b)),  $R_{sm}$  decreased from 137.0  $\mu\text{m}$  to 81.8  $\mu\text{m}$ . Therefore, the density of peaks shows a significant increasing trend. Moreover, the depth of microstructures shows an increasing trend due to average  $R_z$  increased from 18.9  $\mu\text{m}$  to 77.2  $\mu\text{m}$ . Therefore, it can be concluded that the superhydrophobicity will benefit from the increase of  $R_{hy}$ .



(a)

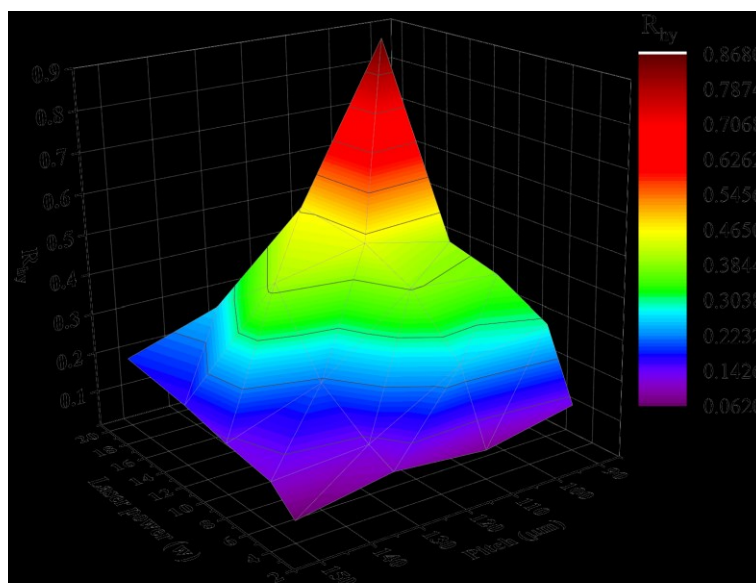


(b)

**Figure 6.** (a) Fitted line by exponential function between  $R_{hy}$  and contact angle; (b) Surface morphology and shape of water drops on specimens with different value of  $R_{hy}$ .

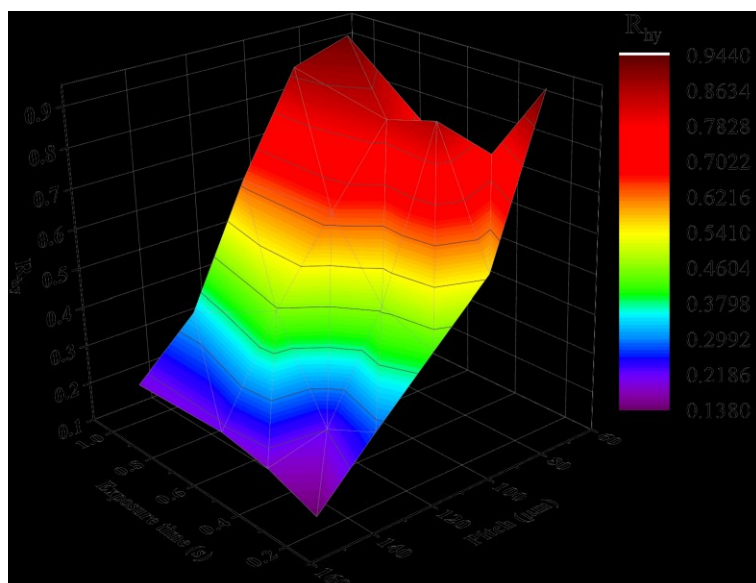
#### 4.2 Analysis of process fingerprints: $P$ , $t$ and $I_s$

The above section proves that  $R_{hy}$  is the most appropriate product fingerprint to the laser ablated superhydrophobic structures on 316L stainless steel. In this section, further analysis of the experimental results will be performed to identify the best process fingerprint from the candidates  $P$ ,  $t$  and  $I_s$ , i.e. the process fingerprint which has the strongest correlation with  $R_{hy}$ . The control of process fingerprints helps to choose appropriate process parameter to obtain surface with  $R_{hy}$  greater than the threshold value ( $R_{hy} > 0.41$ ). The correlation among laser power, pitch of Gaussian hole and  $R_{hy}$  is shown in Figure 7. It shows that higher laser power and smaller pitch lead to a higher value of  $R_{hy}$ . Laser power and pitch of structures have combined effects on the value of  $R_{hy}$ .



**Figure 7.** 3D colormap of the product fingerprint ( $R_{hy}$ ) as a function of laser power and pitch of Gaussian hole.

The effect of **exposure** time  $t$  and pitch of Gaussian holes on **the** value of  $R_{hy}$  is presented in Figure 8. There is no significant linear correlation between **exposure** time and  $R_{hy}$ , but it does not mean **exposure** time has no effect on  $R_{hy}$ . As a whole, it can be found that the value of  $R_{hy}$  shows a significant increasing trend with the reduction of pitch from 150  $\mu m$  to 70  $\mu m$ .

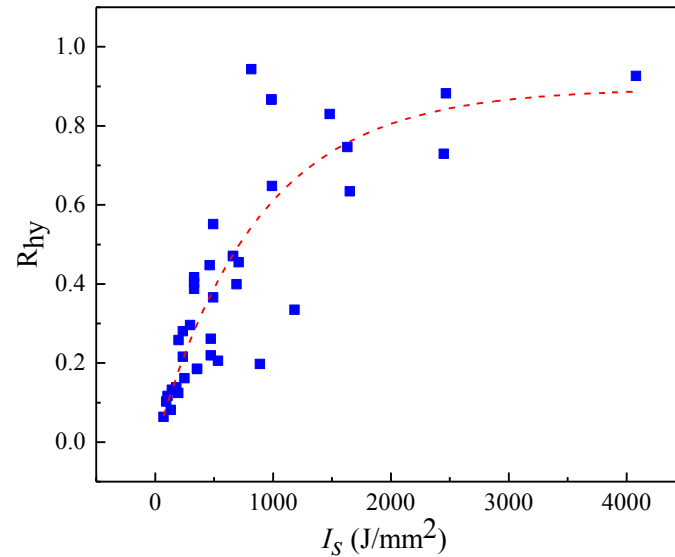


**Figure 8.** 3D colormap of the product fingerprint ( $R_{hy}$ ) as a function of **exposure** time and pitch of Gaussian holes.

The above analysis shows that laser power, pitch and **exposure** time have a collective influence on  $R_{hy}$ . Focusing one of them and ignoring the other two would lead to the determined correlation only effective in certain partial conditions. For instance, the  $R_{hy}$  will increase with laser power but only valid at a precondition of constant pitch and **exposure** time. Therefore, a comprehensive factor  $I_s$  was designed to represent the combined influence of laser power, pitch and **exposure** time.  $I_s$  means the energy intensity that irradiated on the unit area of specimen and can be calculated by the Equation (5).  $I_s$  is proportional to the laser power  $P$  and the **exposure** time  $t$ , but inversely proportional to the square of pitch of microstructures. Figure 9 reveals that the increasing  $I_s$  leads  $R_{hy}$

increase rapidly at first, and then level off to become asymptotic to the upper limit. The presence of upper limit means the further increased laser power, **exposure** time and smaller pitch cannot lead to a further increase of  $R_{hy}$ . The correlation between  $I_s$  and  $R_{hy}$  can be expressed as Equation (11). According to the calculation result,  $I_s$  should be greater than 536 J/mm<sup>2</sup> to ensure  $R_{hy}$  greater than 0.41, hence the contact angle of specimen will be larger than 150°.

$$R_{hy} = 0.895 - 0.898 * 0.9985^{I_s} \quad (11)$$

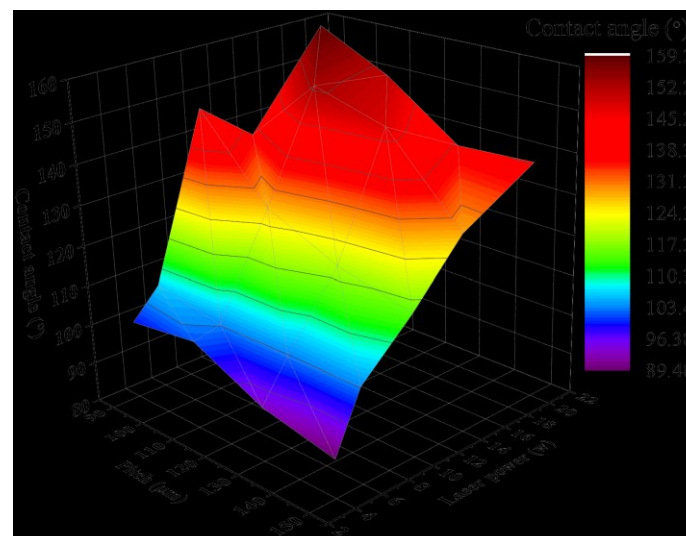


**Figure 9.** Scatter plots and fitted curve of  $R_{hy}$  and  $I_s$ .

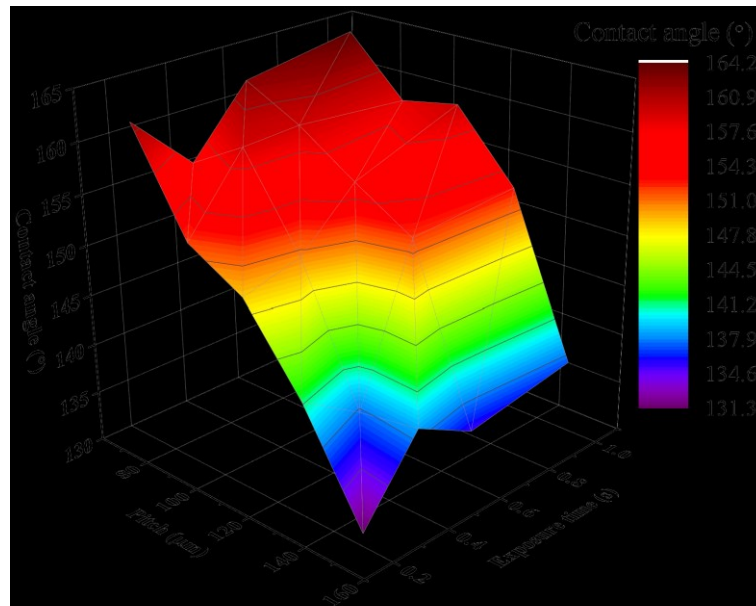
Therefore, the increased  $I_s$  leads to rapidly increase of  $R_{hy}$ , the correlation between  $R_{hy}$  can be described by the exponential function.  $I_s$  is the most sensitive parameters among the investigated three process fingerprint candidates, so it is the best process fingerprint that can be used to control surface morphology, especially the product fingerprint  $R_{hy}$ .

#### 4.3 Correlation between laser machining parameters and Contact angle

As shown in Figure 10, 3D colormaps are used to display the relationship between laser power, **exposure** time, pitch of structures and contact angle. To sum up, the greater contact angle benefit from larger laser power and smaller pitch of microstructures except for some outliers.



(a)



(b)

**Figure 10.** (a) 3D colormap of the contact angle as a function of laser power and pitch of microstructures; (b) 3D colormap of the contact angle as a function of exposure time and pitch of microstructures.

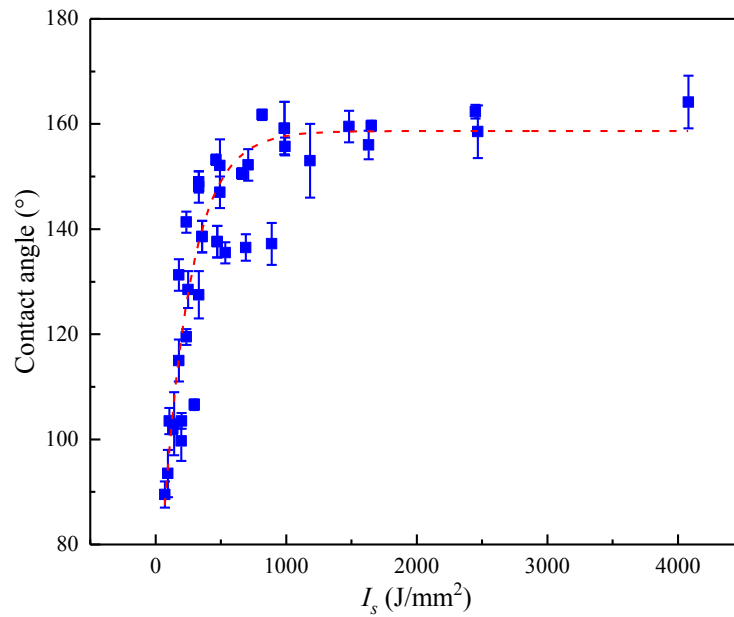
Figure 11 (a) shows the scatter diagram and fitted curve between contact angle and  $I_s$ . The increasing  $I_s$  results in a rapid increase of contact angle at first, and then level off to become asymptotic to the upper limit when  $I_s$  greater than 1000 J/mm<sup>2</sup>. The empirical correlation between contact angle and  $I_s$  can be expressed by Equation (12). When the value of  $R_{hy}$  equals to the threshold value of 0.41, the corresponding  $I_s$  is 516.6 J/mm<sup>2</sup>, which is very close to the value of 536 J/mm<sup>2</sup> obtain from Equation (11). Therefore,  $I_s$  should be larger than 536 J/mm<sup>2</sup> in the laser ablation process, which help ensure the contact angle larger than 150°.

$$\theta_A = a - b * e^{d * I_s} \quad (12)$$

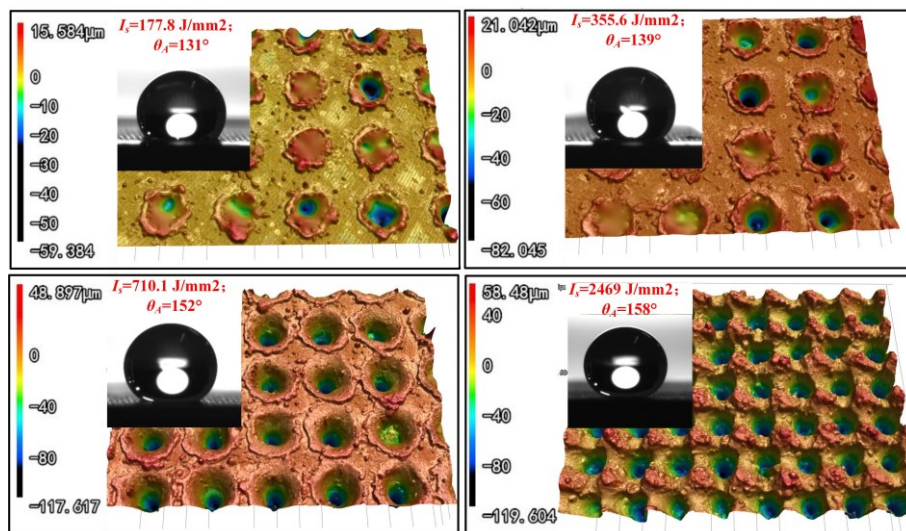
where,  $\theta_A$  is contact angle,  $a=164$ ,  $b=105$ ,  $d=-0.0039$ . Coefficients of  $a$  and  $b$  have same meaning with Equation (10).

The surface morphology and shape of water drops on specimens with different value of  $I_s$  are shown in Figure 11 (b). With the increase of  $I_s$ , the depth and density of structures show a significant increasing trend. Thus, the surface topography and contact angle can be well controlled by choosing the appropriate process parameter  $I_s$ .





(a)



(b)

**Figure 11.** (a) Scatter plot and fitted curve between contact angle and  $I_s$ ; (b) Surface morphology and shape of water drops on specimens with different value of  $I_s$ .

## 5. Conclusions

In this study, the concepts of product and process fingerprint are put forward for the first time to reveal the correlations among process parameters, surface topography and functional performance i.e. contact angle of laser ablated superhydrophobic surface on 316L stainless steel. The most appropriate product fingerprint was determined by the indicators of Spearman and Kendall rank correlation coefficients. Then, the candidate that was most sensitive to product fingerprint was determined as the best process fingerprint. Lastly, the correlation between process fingerprint and functional performance was developed. The conclusions can be drawn as follows:

1. The dimensionless surface functional characterization parameter, i.e. the average ratio of  $R_z$  to  $R_{sm}$  ( $R_{hy}$ ) is the most sensitive parameter to contact angle of specimen, which can be regarded as the product fingerprint.



2. Laser pulse energy per unit area on specimen ( $I_s$ ) represents the combining effect of laser power, exposure time and pitch of structure on surface topography. It is the best process fingerprint that can be used to control the product fingerprint  $R_{hy}$ .

3. The increasing  $I_s$  leads to value of  $R_{hy}$  increase rapidly at first, and then level off to become asymptotic to the upper limit. A similar trend also can be found between  $I_s$  - contact angle and  $R_{hy}$  - contact angle. The threshold value of  $R_{hy}$  and  $I_s$  are 0.41 and 536 J/mm<sup>2</sup> respectively, which help to ensure the superhydrophobicity (contact angle larger than 150°) of specimen in the laser ablation process.

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